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Mr. *B R A D T*'s
SERMON,
AT
WHITE-HALL.

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MR BRADY

SERMON



WHITE-HALL

A
SERMON

PREACH'D At the
Chapel - Royal

AT
WHITE-HALL:

On *Sunday* the 19th of *January*, 1701.

By *N. Brady*, D. D. Minister of *Richmond* in *Surry*,
and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

Published at the request of several that were present.

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SERMON



Chapel - Royal

WHITE-HALL:

On 21st Decr 1701

By a Bill of the House of Commons

For the better settling the Succession

to the Throne

Printed by J. Sturges, in the Strand

1701

SERMON.

1 COR. 2. xiv.

But the Natural Man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

TO endeavour to accommodate the sublime *Mysteries of Religion*, to the Measure and Standard of *humane Reason*; to attempt to sound the Abyss of *Divine Wisdom*, with the short line and plummet of our *finite Understanding*; is what has puzzled the most able, put the most curious to a stand; and only gives occasion to the loose and the profane, to cavil at, and ridicule those unfathomable *Secrets*, and the *Religion* too, which has Established them. Since therefore Christianity re-

commends to us some Truths, which our imperfect Knowledge cannot fully account for; as that of the *Incarnation*, the *Trinity* and such like; and since the Errors which Men run into in relation to such *Doctrines*, have been made use of as a pretence for rejecting *all Revelation*; I shall therefore beg leave to employ my time and your Attention, upon an enquiry into the Causes by which it comes to pass, that these incomprehensible Maxims of Divinity, have had sometimes an effect very different from the Design of them, even to *shock* that Faith which they were only meant to *Exercise*; that so from a due consideration of them, we may be able to learn how we ought to comport our selves, when we are conversant about Mysteries of so adorable a Nature. And to this very end that portion of Scripture, which I have chosen for the Subject of our present Meditations, seems to have been directed by the Apostle; when he tells his *Corinthians* in the words of my Text, *That the natural Man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* In my following Discourse upon which words, I shall insist upon these Four Particulars.

First, I shall explain the terms here used by the Apostle, that we may better understand the Doctrine that is couch'd under them; Namely, what is meant by the *Natural Man*, what by *the things of the Spirit of God*, and what by *the discerning of those things spiritually*.

Secondly,

Secondly, I shall prove that this Natural Man, neither receives nor can know these things of God's Spirit, but that they are foolishness unto him.

Thirdly, I shall shew that the great reason, of his ignorance and averseness to these things of God's Spirit, is because they are spiritually discerned. And

Fourthly, I shall enquire what is necessary to be done, in order to qualifie us for that spiritual discernment; by which alone we can be enabled, to receive and know the things of God's Spirit.

1. Then, I shall explain the terms here used by the Apostle, that we may better understand the Doctrine that is couched under them. Namely, what is meant by the *Natural Man*; what by the *things of the Spirit of God*; and what by the *discerning of those things spiritually*. And

First, As to what is meant by the Natural Man. The Natural Man is he, who measures the most exalted Mysteries of Divinity, by natural Reason, humane Prudence, external Sense, and worldly Affection; who is so full of esteem for his own Abilities, that he makes them the Standard of every Truth, and tries all Doctrines by that Touchstone; who shuts his Eyes with a wilful obstinacy against the clear Light of Faith and Revelation; and is contented and resolved to grope out his way, by the glimmering twilight of his own Understanding; who tho' he cannot wink so hard, as not to see and acknowledg

an *Almighty Being*; yet will not allow that he concerns himself so far with us, as to disclose his Will to us any other way, than by the first impressions which he made upon our Souls. This is the Man, who since *Atheism* has deservedly been laughed out of countenance, carries on the same pernicious Designs, under the fashionable and more plausible name of *Deist*; who sets up for a *moral* and a *rational* Man; and laughs at all the Tenets of *revealed Religion*, as the idle Dreams of *Superstition*, or the empty Notions of *Enthusiasm*. And this is he, of whom the Apostle pronounces, that *he receives not, nor can know the things of God's Spirit*. But

Secondly, As to what is meant by *the Things of the Spirit of God*. By *the Things of God's Spirit* we are to understand, such Maxims and Doctrines of the Christian Profession, as exceed the Power of our imperfect Reason, fully to account for or comprehend; such as being revealed by the *Spirit of God*, and insensibly made credible by the *Demonstration of that Spirit*; are therefore plain and evident to the *spiritual Man*, tho' they seem absurd and unaccountable to the *carnal Reasoner*; such as being the product of *God's infinite Wisdom*, do dazzle and confound our weak *humane Understanding*, and make it blind with too much Light; but are supportable by the stronger Eye of *Faith*, to which they are manifested with the utmost clearness. These are the things which the Apostle assures us, that the *Natural Man* while he continues such, and rejects the assistances of the *Divine Spirit*, *neither does receive nor can he know them*. But

Thirdly,

Thirdly, As to what is meant, by the *discerning of these Things spiritually*. To *discern Things spiritually*, is to feel within us, the powerful operation of God's holy Spirit, casting down imaginations, and every high thing, that exalts it self against the Knowledge of God, and making our Reason truckle to our Faith; to be fully sensible of such inward *Convictions*, as cannot be wrought by any *Wisdom* but that which is *Infinite*; and to give such a steadfast assent to *Divine Truths*, as no *humane* Authority can create within us; to look no farther than the Divine Testimony which they have, to make all things credible which come so recommended; not to *quench* God's Spirit by a *cool reception*, or grieve it by a *froward rejection*, or *resist* it by an *obstinate opposition*, of those Sacred Mysteries which it is willing to reveal to us; but cheerfully to lay hold upon its directions, willingly to take it for our Guide and Councillour; and to submit all the faculties of our Souls to him, who (our Saviour assures us) *shall lead us into all Truth*. This is a short description of *that spiritual discernment*, which the *Apostle* insinuates to be absolutely necessary, in order to our *receiving* and *knowing the things of God's Spirit*; because he assigns it as the substantial reason, why the *Natural Man* who is destitute of it, is therefore unqualified to *receive or know them*. And thus much shall suffice for the first thing proposed, which was to explain, what is meant by the *Natural Man*; what by *the things of the Spirit of God*, and what by *discerning of those things spiritually*. I proceed to the consideration of my

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2. Proposition,

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2. Proposition, in which I am to prove that the *Natural Man*, neither receives nor can know these things of God's Spirit, but that they are foolishness unto him.

God throughout the whole *Oeconomy* of the Gospel seems to strike at the *Pride* by which our first Parents fell, and to endeavour to plant *Meekness* and *Humility* in the room of it; pursuant to this Design, he exacts the *subjection*, both of our *Understanding* and our *Will*; that neither of them may presume to stand in Competition, either with his *Wisdom* or his *Power*: The former he obliges contentedly to acquiesce, in the *Belief* of such *Mysteries* as he vouchsafes to reveal; and the latter he requires to determine its *Choice* conformably to those *Rules* which he is pleas'd to prescribe; and our *carnal Reason* is no more countenanced, to magnifie it self against the *Wisdom* of God; than our *sensual Appetites* are allowed to gratifie themselves in opposition to his *Authority*. But in direct contradiction to all this, the *Natural Man* sets up his own Reason as the infallible *Judge of Controversies*, will not bring his Cause before any other *Bar*, or admit of an *Appeal* to a higher *Tribunal*; but will have that pass a definitive Sentence, upon such things, as are not in their Nature triable by it: A *blind Man* is as capable of distinguishing *Colours*, as *Reason* is of comprehending the *Objects of Faith*; these are the effects of an *unbounded Wisdom*, and that the *Exercise* of a *limited Understanding*; and we may as well pretend to contain the watry Treasures of the Ocean in the hollow of our hand, as to measure the workings of an *infinite Knowledge*, by the scantiness and insufficiency of

of our *finite Reason*. And yet this is that *absurd* and *unfair Method*, which this pretender to *Reason* and *Morality*, allows himself to proceed by; he will acknowledge nothing to be *Truth* or *Wisdom*, but what agrees exactly with *his own Notions*; and having once established this *Fundamental*, whatever *soars above* his Reason, shall seem to him as airy and ridiculous, as any thing else that *lags below* it; and if the *Stoicks* at *Athens*, or *Epicureans*, must give their determination upon the *Doctrines* of *St. Paul*, the *Wisdom of God* shall be *foolishness* with them, and the *Disciple of Gamaliel* shall be called a *Babler*. Let us talk to such a Man of the *Trinity in Unity*, and he tells us we are quite out in *common Arithmetick*; assure him that a *Virgin* brought forth a *Son*, and he smiles to himself at our ignorance in *Natural Philosophy*; discourse with him concerning the *Hypostatick Union*, the assumption of the *Manhood* into *God*, and he answers, that he never met any thing like it, in all the experiments which he ever made: Thus he quotes himself against the *Authority of God*; and tho' he pretends to confess him in *terms*, yet denies him in *consequence*, by disallowing, that any *Wisdom* can extend farther than *his own*, or that any thing can be true which wants *his approbation*. For we equally disown the *Perfections of God*, by *exalting our selves* to the same pitch with him, or by *debasing him* to our own level. If we farther consider that *this natural Man* having no communication with the *Divine Spirit*, must be therefore indisposed for those *Lessons of Purity*, which are contained in the *things of the Spirit of God*; if we seriously re-

flect that in such a Person, *Reason* must be very much sunk down into *Sense*; it will furnish us with another substantial Cause, why he *cannot receive nor know these things*; there being such an *Antipathy* between the *Flesh* and the *Spirit*, as will make the Dictates of the *One*, be grating and therefore suspicious to the *Other*: And this Argument is supported by some ancient *Translations*, in which the word that we render the *Natural Man*, is otherwise interpreted the *sensual Man*; the *sensual Man receives not the things of the Spirit of God*. Thus we have seen, how the *things of the Spirit of God*, are *foolishness unto the Natural Man*; and can *neither be received nor known by him*; because being misled either by *Pride* or *Sensuality*, he is not inclined to make use of those means, which are only able to give him a true conception of them. And this leads me to the consideration of my.

3. Proposition, in which I am to shew that the greatest Reason, of his ignorance and averseness to *these things of God's Spirit*, is *because that they are spiritually discerned*.

The *Apostle* informs us in this same Chapter, That *no Man can know the things of a Man, except the Spirit of a Man which is in him*; and from thence infers with the greatest justness, that *neither can any one know the things of God, but the Spirit of God*: Can our *Reason* direct us to the discovery of those *thoughts*, which are lodged in the Breast of our *Fellow Creature*? and if not, how should we be able to pry into those
Secrets,

Secrets, which *God* has reserved to *his own Knowledge*? We can discover nothing of them of our selves; and we must be obliged to *his Holy Spirit*, for whatever Revelations we may hope for of that Nature. *Where then is the Scribe, where is the Wise, where is the Disputer of the World? Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World?* It cannot of its self attain to any Informations, which may be perfective of its true Happiness; it cannot arrive at any of those advantages, of which our *Nature* is capable when improved by *Grace*: But when *God's good Spirit* has imparted his assistance, we shall open our Eyes as in *another World*, and view at once all the Treasures of the Divine Wisdom; *Faith* will convince us of the Truth of all those Mysteries, which the *Natural Man* is incapable of discerning; we shall then have such Notions of *God's Wisdom* and his *Truth*, as will make us give up our selves with an entire Resignation, to what *One* discovers and the *Other* confirms: When that *Holy Spirit* has whispered to our Souls, what *it could not have entered into the Heart of Man to conceive*, we shall find our selves as certain that its Maxims are unquestionable; as that there is a *God*, a *God of Truth*. In vain shall humane *Reason* attempt to struggle against Mysteries of too noble and sublime a Nature, to be canvassed or examined by so feeble an *Inquisitor*, when it feels it self over-ruled by a Power that is irresistible, and undoubtedly assured of what it cannot comprehend. But I beg that I may not be mistaken in this point, as if I asserted that the workings of *God's Spirit*, were directly opposite to our *humane Reason*; it is so

so far from acting contrary to *That*, that one effectual Method which it uses for our instruction, is to exalt, and as it were, to spiritualize our *Reason*; by letting that see clearly the Divine Authority, by which the *Mysteries* of our *Religion* are recommended; and which when our *Reason* is once assured of, *That* must engage us to close heartily with them. *Faith* may indeed sometimes fly higher than *Reason*, and leave that a little out of sight, but it never clashes with or contradicts it; since that it self is but a sort of *Reasoning*, more elevated and abstracted from the Senses, being stiled the *Evidence of things not seen*. But how strangely indisposed must the *Natural Man* be, to qualify himself for these gracious Illuminations! He must part with all that he is most fond of; and his darling *Reason*, his unerring *Guide*, must be supposed unable to direct him in his goings; for while he keeps up his lofty Opinion of that, it is impossible that ever he should be made partaker of those clearer lights which *God's Spirit* would afford him; and no wonder nor pity is it, if he be misled; who will rather wander through *Darkness* after a deluding Meteor, than travel safely at *Noon-day* by the *Light of the Sun*. How shall he listen patiently to the Dictates of *God's Spirit*, whose understanding has not yet informed him, *whether there be any Holy Ghost or no*? How shall he give assent to the *Articles* of our *Faith*, whose carnal *Reason* tells him they are so many *absurdities*? How shall he submit to be instructed in the *Truth*, who thinks he is possessed of all useful *Knowledge*? How will he entertain the Lessons of that *Wisdom from above*, which

which is *pure and peaceable, full of mercy and good Fruits*; when he is wholly taken up with that other *false Wisdom*, which is pronounced to be *earthly, sensual, devilish*? It is impossible that a Man, who continues in these Circumstances; who neither seeks for, or deserves the assistance of *God's Spirit*, but depends upon the strength of his own *natural faculties*; who thinks his *Reason* infallible, and himself above erring; should ever *receive* (that is) assent to, or *know* (that is) comprehend, the *things of God's Spirit* which are of a *spiritual Nature*, and which cannot be otherwise than *spiritually discerned*: The *Apostle* therefore had sufficient grounds, to assign this as the Reason, for such a Person's *not knowing or receiving them*, because he is a *Natural Man*, and they require a *Spiritual discernment*. I shall now proceed in the

Fourth and last place, to enquire what is necessary to be done, in order to qualify us for *that spiritual discernment*, by which alone we can be enabled, to *receive and know the things of God's Spirit*.

The First thing which we are to do in order to this end, is carefully to implant within our Souls, the most Christian Vertue of *Humility*. We have already seen that the main opposition, which the *Natural Man* made against *the things of God's Spirit*, was occasioned by *Pride*, by *Self-conceitdness*, and a fond opinion of his own Sufficiency; this kept him at a distance from that *spiritual discernment*, which it is our great business to qualify our selves for; and

and therefore it is necessary that we immediately shake off this over-weening conceit of our own abilities; that we be conscious of our wants, and not ashamed to acknowledge them; that we be willing to recognize our vileness and our ignorance; and desirous to receive the assistance of *God's Spirit*, at once to purifie us and instruct us: Then will God, *who resists the Proud*, assuredly give his Grace to us *that are thus humble*; and his Grace it is, and that alone, which is able to impart to us *that spiritual discernment*, by which we may preceive, in what the World calls *foolishness*, both the *Power of God*, and the *Wisdom of God*. For *Humility*, like *Jacob's Ladder*, tho' it has *one end* upon the *Earth*, in the Self-abasement of *Man the Practitioner*, yet reaches with the *other* up to *Heaven*, in the gracious approbation of *God the recompencer*; and the *Angels which ascended and descended upon it*, do fitly represent *those things of the Spirit of God*, which are the humble *Man's* delightful entertainment. That meekness of Spirit, that condescending temper, which could unite in *our Saviour* the *Godhead* with *Humanity*; can also with his followers exalt our *humane Nature*, into a free participation of the *Spirit of our God*. In a word, *Pride* it was that disposed our first unhappy Parents, to listen to the malicious Suggestions of the *Devil*; and *Humility* therefore will be our Preparative, for receiving the useful Lessons of *God's Holy Spirit*. But

Secondly, Another thing which we must do in order to this end, is to free our Minds from all prejudice

judice and prepossession, which may partially byas us against the things of God's Spirit.

There are Two things which are apt to make strong impressions upon the Mind, and which care must be taken to remove before-hand; or they will mightily obstruct *that spiritual discernment*, which it is our Duty and our Interest to endeavour to attain to; and those are a *profane Education*, and a *vicious Conversation*. The former of these, a *profane Education*, will powerfully indispose them whose unhappy lot it is, for *receiving or knowing the things of God's Spirit*: When one sucks in false Principles with his Mothers milk, and is bred up from his Childhood in *Atheistical Notions*; it will be very difficult for him to judge impartially, of those things which give a shock to the Maxims he has Established: Reason in such a case is seldom made use of, duely to *examine* the Authority on both sides; but it is frequently employed only to coin *Arguments*, for the support of that Opinion to which he has been wedded. How often has a *Prejudice* of this Nature confirmed Men in such gross absurdities, as nothing could recommend to a reasonable Creature, but the being used to assent to them from his Cradle? and therefore he that lies under this indisposition, must be sure to use his utmost diligence, to root out of his mind such unhappy *prepossessions*; and then if he gives an impartial hearing, to *carnal Reason* on the one side, and *God's Spirit* on the other; we may be certain that the power and efficacy of the *latter* will silence all the Cavils and Objections of the
C *former.*

former. But there is yet another impediment to be removed, more general and more dangerous than what we have been considering, and that is the *prejudice of a vicious Conversation*: Our *Lusts* and *Appetites* will never be allowed to indulge themselves, as they would do, in *sensual Delights*, if once we grow obedient to the Dictates of *God's Spirit*; and therefore they will be sure to lay obstacles in our way, which may hinder us from complying with those divine Lessons: The uneasiness of renouncing the chief pleasures of Sense, and leading a life of temperance and regularity, which must be the Consequences of our *spiritual discernment*, will be such a stumbling-block as we cannot readily get over, without setting a steadfast and manly Resolution, not to be bribed in a wrong Cause by any *carnal* consideration: Then may we examine safely and judicially, what our *Passions* can urge against the *things of God's Spirit*, and may give ear at the same time to what *That* can say, in defence and confirmation of its *own Assertions*; and if we thus proceed with a commendable indifferency, to weigh both parts fairly in the *ballance of the Sanctuary*; *God will without doubt be justified in his sayings, and will overcome when he is thus equally judged.* But

Thirdly, Another means to attain to that *spiritual discernment*, by which we may receive and know the things of *God's Spirit*, is to keep our Reason within just bounds, and yet give it a due Latitude in matters of Religion.

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If Man were defined a *Religious* Creature, I think the Character would be stricter and more just, than as we usually distinguish him, a *rational* Creature; since there are many Actions of *inferior Animals*, which seem to come very near the operations of *Reason*; but none that I know of which have any resemblance, to the power or practices of *Religion*: But if *Religion* were to exclude all exercise of *Reason*, a *Beast* might be qualified for it as well as a *Man*: We must not therefore imagine that *God* expects, we should renounce our *Reason* when we enter upon *Faith*, or cease to be *Men* when we begin to be *Christians*; on the contrary he requires our *reasonable service*, and that the strength of our *Understanding* should be useful to our *Religion*: Only we must take care that in the enquiries which it makes, it be always accompanied with a deference and submission, proportionable to *Mysteries* of so sublime a Nature; it must not expect that the workings of *infinite Wisdom*, should square in all points with our *humane frailty*; but must first examine the Authority by which they are supported, and when it is convinced that it is *Divine*, must then yield and resign it self to that Authority, without daring to dispute or *rebell* against it. For *Reason* cannot furnish us with any *Idea* of *God*, unless *infinite Truth* and *infinite Wisdom* be Two of his essential inseparable *Attributes*; and wherever these qualities are in perfection, which render it impossible to *deceive* or be *deceived*, we cannot but believe the most mysterious *Revelations*, and *Reason* will thus conduct us on to *Faith*. St. Paul reasoned before Felix, of *Righteousness*,

ousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come; his usual Method for converting the Jews, was by reasoning with them out of the Scriptures; and St. Peter advises us to be ready to give an Answer, to every one that asks a Reason of the hope which is in us; and therefore they who would make Reason inconsistent with Religion, would set up Fancy or Enthusiasm in the stead of it; since This well regulated is the most available Instrument, to ground us in That Religion which has the best Authority to recommend it, and to keep us stedfast and unmoveable in that holy Profession: For if Reason thus joins forces with the Spirit of God, there is nothing but Sense to oppose them afterwards; and That will never be able to maintain the Combat, against the united Powers of Two that are so far its Superiors. But

Fourthly, and Lastly, In order to arrive at this spiritual discernment, let us be conversant in such things as may encrease our Faith. The Natural Man we see, neither receives nor knows the things of God's Spirit, let us therefore throw off this Natural Man, whether he be the speculative Deist, or the practical One; whether he be the profane Reasoner against Revelation, or the vicious Practicer against Religion; and let us be renewed in the Spirit of our Mind, and put upon us the New-Man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness; that so we may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth Knowledge,

Knowledg, that we may be filled with the fulness of God: Let us meditate frequently upon the Divine Attributes, and how worthy they render their Owner of unquestionable Credit; let us remember, that the foolishness of God, (as the Apostle speaks boldly) is wiser than Men; and by comparing the weakness of our finite Understanding, with the Power and Strength of his infinite Wisdom; let us learn to keep it under in matters of Religion, and to bring our Reason in subjection to our Faith: Let us thus exercise our Faith and keep it still in Motion, that so we may render it both active and habitual; and let us fervently and frequently beg God's assistance, saying with the Apostles increase our Faith, or with the Father of him that was possessed with a Devil, Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief. Then will he from whom comes every good and perfect Gift, vouchsafe to bestow upon us that spiritual discernment, by which we may understand all Mysteries and all Knowledg; and for want of which, the Natural Man is declared by the Apostle to be utterly unqualified, to receive or to know the things of God's Spirit. To which holy Spirit, with the Father and the Son, be ascribed, all Honour, Power, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, henceforth and for evermore, Amen.

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